

PAY-TO-PLAY POLITICS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FLAKE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. Speaker, over the past several weeks, the political world has been rocked by a scandal that led to the impeachment of the Governor of Illinois. At issue was the specter of pay-to-play, more specifically the possibility that political favors were either promised or exchanged, exchanged for campaign contributions.

The vote to remove Governor Blagojevich by the Illinois Senate was unanimous. Condemnation from Capitol Hill was equally swift and unequivocal. Pay-to-play politics should have no place.

Fast forward just a few weeks.

We now know that the Department of Justice is conducting an investigation into the propriety of campaign contributions made by individuals associated with the powerhouse lobbying firm the PMA Group, individuals who have contributed nearly 3.3 million to the campaigns and political action committees of many Members in this body. Within days of the announcement of the FBI investigation, the PMA Group, which had revenues of more than 15 million just last year, imploded.

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So what would cause those associated with the PMA Group to contribute millions of dollars to Members of Congress? Here's what the public sees; press reports that nearly nine in 10 Members who made earmark requests in the fiscal year 2008 Defense Appropriation bill for clients of the PMA Group also received campaign contributions from those associated with the PMA Group. Those earmark requests resulted in nearly \$300 million in earmark money for PMA clients.

Mr. Speaker, much has been made of the rule changes in the 110th Congress that add transparency to the process of earmarking. As one who had sought these changes for years, I was the first to applaud when these new rules were adopted. Sunlight always illuminates, but it doesn't always disinfect. We now see what scurries around our feet, but we seem unwilling to grab a broom and clean house.

Let me illustrate. Less than 6 months ago, we approved the Defense Appropriations bill for fiscal year 2009 as part of a so-called "minibus." Some 48 hours before the bill was to be considered on the House floor, we learned that it contained more than 2,000 House earmarks, none of which had been considered by the full House Appropriations Committee. The minibus was considered as an amendment to the Senate bill, and therefore not a single earmark challenge was allowed. We now know, of course, that multiple earmarks in the minibus were secured for clients of the PMA Group. In addition, several earmarks in the minibus went to

Kuchera Industries, a PMA client that is also being investigated by the Department of Justice.

So here we are today, Mr. Speaker, about to consider an omnibus appropriations bill that contains more than 8,000 earmarks. It should be noted that we received the earmark list just hours ago. Of course, it's impossible to dig through 8,000 earmarks before the bill comes to the floor on Wednesday. But this much we know: In the list of earmarks we received are several earmarks worth millions of dollars for clients of the PMA Group.

What else is in this bill? What other embarrassing details are just waiting for concerned citizens, enterprising reporters or curious Justice Department officials to discover?

A short while ago, I noticed a privileged resolution on this situation. This is not a partisan resolution because this is not a partisan issue. I would implore my colleagues not to treat it as such. The "whereas" clauses mention no party or Member. The "resolve" clauses simply ask the Ethics Committee to investigate the relationship between earmarks and campaign contributions so that we can determine if the rules that we have in the House are adequate to maintain the dignity of the House.

We see enduring examples of Members on both sides of the aisle taking their responsibility as stewards of taxpayer money very seriously. But when we are seen to be earmarking funds to campaign donors, we give unnecessary fodder to those who would question our motives.

Some may argue that the absence of a visible quid pro quo with regard to earmarks and campaign contributions absolves us from our responsibility to take action on this resolution. After all, investigations are moving ahead; shouldn't they just take their course? This is certainly an option, but consider the cost to the reputation of this body. Should Department of Justice investigations, indictments and convictions be the standard for taking action to uphold the dignity of the House?

Mr. Speaker, we owe far more to this institution than we are giving it. Let's pass this resolution and give this institution the respect and dignity it deserves.

THE STIMULUS BILL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2009, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BURGESS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, as we left town right before the Presidents' Day recess, many of us spoke on the floor of this House about the issue of what was then the issue of the day, the issue before the House, the stimulus bill, the spending bill, the "jobs bill," as it was described, but a bill that unfortunately contained much more Federal spending than anything else.

This bill was posted on a Web site late in the night. It was not posted in a forum that was searchable by any Member of Congress. And you heard over and over again on the floor of this House a little over a week ago how no one in this House had been able to adequately peruse the bill—indeed, read the bill—before it came to a vote that Friday before last.

The bill came to us late in the night. There seemed to be a great rush about getting it done—after all, the country is in dire trouble, people are needing this legislation to be passed—and then we all took a 3-day weekend; the Speaker took off to points unknown in Italy; the President took a vacation back home. And then finally, the day after Presidents' Day, the following Tuesday, the 17th, the bill was signed into law.

We were then informed by several of the Federal agencies charged with dispensing this money and getting it out quickly into the economy to quickly have that stimulative effect that it is purported to have on the economy, well, we're told that many of those Federal agencies, it will take some time for them to promulgate the rules and set forth the rules under which this money is to be distributed amongst the Federal agencies. And it, indeed, may be the early part of the summer before some of this stimulus money actually makes it into the economy.

I noticed in my home paper, the Dallas Morning News, today a gentleman wrote in—I assume it was tongue in cheek—he said, being in his advanced stage, he felt that he might be one of those shovel-ready projects that was mentioned in the stimulus bill. I am going to assume that that was a light-hearted remark on his part. But it brings to mind a more serious nature of what we are facing.

And we've heard it so many times over the past month's time, the amount of money, \$787 billion contained in this bill—more if you factor in the cost of capital, the cost of financing this bill, then the cost goes up to \$1.1 or \$1.2 trillion. The bill has built-in funding cliffs where if you really were honest about the amount of funding it would require to continue this stimulus bill over the actual life of the bill, we're probably talking about a bill that's closer to \$3 trillion. And \$3 trillion is \$3 trillion that we don't have sitting in the Federal Treasury waiting to be dispensed. This is, in fact, money that will have to come from somewhere.

Where is it going to come from? Well, it's going to come from the United States selling public debt. And the good news is that debt is still a saleable commodity on the world market, that people are still willing to purchase our debt. The good news is that they are still willing to purchase our debt and the interest rate has not risen significantly. But those days will only last so long because consider what is just right around the corner. You heard

the gentleman from Arizona talk about an omnibus bill that will be on the floor of this House in less than 48 hours. The omnibus bill will spend roughly \$410 billion on top of the \$787 billion that we just spent toward the end of last week. Bear in mind once again, we're not figuring in the cost of borrowing that money in that figure of \$410 billion.

And a little more than 24 hours from now the President will stand in this House and address a joint session of the House and Senate—all will be assembled here—and he will lay out his plan, his budget for the next year of the United States of America. At the present time, I do not know what the top number is, but I suspect it will be in excess of \$3 trillion. In fact, I expect it to be in excess of \$3.3 trillion because that would be a little bit above the number that was approved the last year that President Bush submitted his budget.

So we all know it takes a lot of money to run the country over a year's time, and yet we've had TARP I and TARP II, and now stimulus one, we're going to have the omnibus or minibus bill in a few day's time, and then we have our regular spending—our regular spending that we've yet to take on for the next fiscal year; truly an absolute explosive growth in the Federal deficit that is going to be seen between now and the end of the fiscal year, September 30.

Mr. Speaker, I had an interesting time at home over the Presidents' Day week when we weren't in session. I talked to a number of my schools throughout my district in north Texas. I talked to the high schoolers in Gainesville, Texas; I talked to a group of home schoolers in rural north Texas; I talked to a group of middle school students in my home of Lewisville; and I talked to a group of students at an early childhood learning center down on the southeast side of Fort Worth. At every location I felt obligated to explain what had just transpired in the United States Congress because I know what it's like when you're a kid, you're not really paying attention to what's going on in these hallowed halls of Congress. And yet every statement we made 2 weeks ago, every dollar we spent 2 weeks ago, every interest obligation we incurred 2 weeks ago is not going to be borne by people my age, it's going to be borne by those youngsters that I was talking to; in fact, likely their children as well.

So we have handed off to the next generation an amount of debt, the likes of which no one has ever seen before. And bear in mind, these are some of the best of times that we've just been through, and yet we are handing off levels of debt that have previously been unseen in this country.

Now, as I went to the high schools, I did feel obligated to explain the mechanisms that created the need for the stimulus bill, the problems I saw with the bill, perhaps some alternative

strategies that were suggested, some by Members of the minority here on the House side, alternatives that were suggested by Members of the other body on the other side of the Capitol. There were alternative strategies out there. There really wasn't any strong chorus of individuals who said we just need to do absolutely nothing. Many of us thought that perhaps by dealing with problems in the Tax Code would be a quicker and more efficient way of returning money to the productive segment of society. But nevertheless, we were cut out of most of those debates because, in the name of speed, in the name of getting this done rapidly, quickly, and getting that money out there—remember, for those shovel-ready projects that are sitting there waiting to go. In the name of getting that money out there quickly we had to forego all meaningful debate and, in fact, just simply had a very short period of time—between a little after midnight eastern standard time on Thursday night until we voted on the bill some 11, 12 hours later here on the floor of the House—to actually make up our minds on whether or not this spending was worthwhile for the country.

And then, as we found out, there really wasn't such a rush because at the end of the day the bill languished for several days, then got shipped to Denver, then got signed. Now the Federal agencies are telling us that it may be some time before they actually get the rules written and the details in place for getting the money out there to the people.

I felt a need also to tender an apology to the high school students that I talked to because, after all, it was our haste in getting this bill out there so quickly, without fully vetting it, without perhaps fully thinking through the consequences of what this level of Federal debt was going to do to subsequent generations. I felt a need to take some responsibility for that even though I did not vote for the bill in its final form and final passage, but nevertheless, as an institution—and we just heard Mr. FLAKE so eloquently talk about the integrity of the institution—because of the integrity of the institution, I certainly bear the responsibility of that bill that left out of here down to the President's desk last week the same as anyone else in this body.

And I also thought it was important to talk to the students about the fact that this is America, this is America. And things may be dark today, but they are not going to be dark forever; in fact, in my opinion, they will not be dark for long. In north Texas, in the late 1980s, we were up against severe, severe economical straits. There was a recession in the country that had sort of slowly languished and rolled around various areas of the country. The price of energy dropped overnight. The price of a barrel of oil plummeted to levels unseen previously down to \$10 a barrel and even lower. The price of real estate

in north Texas plummeted. And loans that were made so businesses could expand were suddenly undercollateralized and those loans were called by the financial institutions. And the people who had made those loans found themselves facing great difficulty in being able to either supply the justification why the loan should be continued or to pay off that loan and settle those debts so that the lending institution would be made whole.

And it was very difficult, very, very difficult times back then in north Texas. Many businesses didn't make it. Many small businesses didn't make it, many medium size and large businesses didn't make it. Many banks in north Texas failed. Fortunately, we did have the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, which came in—they didn't nationalize banks, to be sure. If they found a bank that was in serious trouble they came in and examined its books and said you simply cannot make it. They failed a bank and found a buyer. And sometimes that required subsidizing some of the bad debt within that bank, but they found a buyer, they didn't simply own that bank in perpetuity.

Banks were sold to other areas of the country that weren't in such bad shape. Some banks were allowed to continue, they were allowed to continue with a protocol known as a net worth certificate back at the time which allowed a bank to have on its balance sheet some additional collateral provided by this net worth certificate that was in fact backed up by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation—no actual cash exchanged hands—and then when the bank found its way out of that difficulty, that net worth certificate was repurchased from the bank. And as a consequence, many banks are in business in north Texas today that otherwise might have faced closure, or, in our present scenario today, might have faced what is being euphemistically referred to as “nationalization” with the Federal Government being the owner.

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To be sure, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation owned a portion of those banks for a short period of time, but it was never in business to own those banks long term and did its job as it was intended to do, and also to protect the depositors. And perhaps one of the few good things we have done in the past several months is when the TARP bill was passed last fall, the bank bailout bill, the Wall Street bailout bill was passed last fall, we did increase the dollar amount of Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation insurance to \$250,000, which, in my opinion, was an important thing to do as far as reestablishing some credibility within the banking sector.

But I wanted these students to know, I wanted them to know that I had lived through north Texas in the 1980s. I had seen businesses fail. I had seen friends of mine who owned businesses and had

owned businesses for a number of years not be able to make it in those tough economic times. But, in fact, there was no largess coming from the Federal Government. No one came down from the Federal Government and opened up the coffers and said here's some dollars until you can see your way to get your business going again. That did not occur. Tough times, to be sure, but after those tough times that were over much more quickly than anyone anticipated, we had 25 to 28 years of sustained economic growth, sustained prosperity in north Texas. And the reality is it was only until the recession that hit the rest of the country a little over a year ago finally caught up with north Texas last fall, we had been creating jobs every month up until October or November of last year. So north Texas did, indeed, have a sustained period of prosperity, and it wasn't because the Federal Government came in and bailed people out during the 1980s. It was because people recognized the problems that were before them. They corrected their own finances. They corrected the finances within their business. If they couldn't, the businesses failed, the banks failed. But they picked themselves up, they dusted themselves off, to take a phrase from the presidential inauguration address, and they got on with their business. And they got on with their business in north Texas, and north Texas ultimately reaped the rewards of that.

Contrast that to the country of Japan, which a few short years after that found itself in a recession. Japan was held up to us during the late 1980s as being the beacon of economic strength, but a few short years later, Japan itself was in great difficulty. Japan's federal government decided that it would spend its way out of the recession. They would spend federal dollars until that economy, by golly, got moving again, and the result of that is what is known as the "lost decade" in the country of Japan where economic growth stagnated. And even to this day, even to this day, they are having difficulty facing economic growth in the country of Japan.

North Texas, by contrast, through a severe recession, to be sure, many people suffered as a consequence of that recession, but the rebound for that was many people profited from the sustained period of prosperity that followed.

So I wanted the high school students to know that although the days may seem dark today and although when they turn on their broadcast news or their cable network news shows and people talk about the dire straits of the economy that this is America and we have not forgotten how to grow and we will again grow and this country will again have that long, sustained period of prosperity that we all know of which this country is capable.

But at the same time, the one danger sign, the one red flag out there is that explosive growth of Federal spending

that could undermine that ability of our economy to pull itself up out of this recession and take off into the next period of rebound. And I talk about this, it's not just simply an idea in abstraction. Two weeks ago, coming back to Congress, I went with a group of other Members of Congress down to a little known Federal agency called the Bureau of Public Debt. The Bureau of Public Debt is a part of the United States Department of Treasury. The Bureau of Public Debt is in a big tall building downtown. You go down there, and several times a week they auction off Federal paper, the loans that we are willing to sell to other people. The day we went down there, we watched the third auction of that day. It was for \$32 billion. These were 3-year Treasury notes on sale at that time. Previously they had sold notes that were of a shorter duration and a longer duration. Each time a similar volume of notes were sold. So we're talking about \$100 billion that was sold 2 weeks ago on Tuesday. The auction that we witnessed took about 30 minutes to complete. Again, the good news is there are plenty of people out there willing to buy our debt, willing to buy our paper. Apparently, United States dollars, the United States Treasury note is still a very, very safe place for people to go when they have money and they want to ensure that it stays safe. The interest rate was about 1½ percent, which seemed like a reasonable amount.

But, Mr. Speaker, you must understand later that week we spent another \$787 billion. Really \$1.2 trillion if you figure in the cost of capital. And we're going to spend another \$410 billion this week, and then we're going to have the President's budget, which will be much in excess of \$3 trillion. Ultimately, ultimately, that debt is going to be able to be sold only by an increase in the interest rate. And if that happens, the interest rate increases for everyone else across the country. That crowds out private borrowing. That makes the cost of capital that much higher for any small business person in the country. That makes the ability to create new jobs for any small business person in this country that much more difficult. And do we really want to make it more difficult to create new jobs? Do we want to make it more expensive to create new jobs? That doesn't seem like the way to get yourself out of a recession.

But we sold this public debt, and, again, the good news is that it did sell. We didn't just have to print the money and hope that it sold at some point in the future. There was, in fact, a willing buyer for the debt. The bad news is we are selling about between \$150 to \$160 billion a week in public debt. That's not all new spending. Some of that is recycled debt as those notes mature. But it still underscores the volume of dollars that we are having to float out there in the world currency on literally a weekly basis.

The amount of public debt sold in contrast about a year ago was about

\$100 billion a week. Now we are up to \$150 to \$160 billion a week, which just goes to show the rapid rate with which that has increased. And so far what we have seen out of congressional spending this year, there hasn't been any lack of enthusiasm for spending Federal dollars.

Now, some of the things we saw in the so-called stimulus bill last week, some of the markers for what might be described as health care reform, some people might describe as a greater Federal share in the administration of health care in this country, we certainly saw the markers last week in the stimulus bill.

Now, the state of health care reform, in fact, the whole question of health care reform, was a pretty big piece of the Presidential campaign last fall. In fact, both presidential candidates, the presidential nominees of both major parties, talked a lot about health care during the course of their campaigns, and, of course, any sort of health care reform did comprise a significant portion of the debates between the candidates as we came through the fall. So there really was not any question that some type of change in health care would be coming with whoever took office, and certainly when President Obama was elected, it became clear, at least clear to some of us, what his ideas were during the campaign, and we expected those to come forward during the course of this year.

Now, for whatever reason here we are now nearing the last week of February of this year, the President's having been sworn in a little over a month ago, and as yet we haven't seen the big plans coming out of the White House, the Senate, or the House of Representatives that would signal what type of health care reform is coming down. I noted today after the Economic Responsibility Conference in the White House, a Member from the other body who's chairman of one of the major committees over there stood up and spoke about his vision on the changes in health care and how he still wanted to see a unified position come out of the Senate for consideration, and I still expect that is something we are likely to see.

On the House side, at least on the committee on which I sit, the Committee on Energy and Commerce, the focus seems to be much more on climate change and global warming than it does on the health care reform side. Obviously, we had our early debates with the stimulus bill, but there doesn't seem to be the push on the House side, at least that I got the impression, that the other body is going to put behind this. But suffice it to say it will be part of the discussion. It will be part of the landscape here in the United States Congress certainly for the balance of this year no matter what time that it actually comes up.

There were some significant changes in health care spending that came about as a result of the stimulus bill.

Probably most striking was in the aids to States for Medicaid spending. Currently, the Federal Government takes on about a 57 percent share of Medicaid spending. The States pick up the other 43 percent. Within the stimulus bill, the Federal matching part of that will be increased significantly for some States. It varies in amount from State to State. But this increase in Federal matching for State Medicaid will occur for the next 18 months' time.

Now, you don't have to be a math whiz to know that 18 months from now puts us pretty close to the election of 2010. I don't realistically expect this Congress to back off on any Federal spending a week or a month or 2 before election day. It's going to be very, very difficult to throw a million-plus people off of Medicaid rolls a few months before the election day in 2010. So when I talk about funding cliffs, when I talk about funding that is not sustainable over time, this, indeed, is one of those areas where really people need to concentrate on just how much money has been obligated and what is the likelihood that we will behave by the 18-month time frame that we have set out for ourselves, 12-month time frame on the increased COBRA benefits that were put forward, and the 18-month time frame on increased aid to States for their Medicaid expenditures.

The reality is this is a subprime loan, a subprime loan to the States. There's a big balloon payment due at the end. It's a low interest rate to get you in at the front. You increase the State Medicaid rolls, and 18 months from now, that increase in Federal spending just simply goes away. Again, there is not a person in this body who believes that 18 months from now, just shy of Election Day 2010, that this body is going to withdraw the Medicaid subsidy for a million Americans. It's just not going to happen in a few short weeks prior to Election Day. So, again, if we were really honest about what our spending was last week when we took on this stimulus bill, we would be honest and acknowledge that that spending is, indeed, going to be much higher, much higher than anyone has calculated to date. The actual expenditure, if you were to fund that over the 5-year budget cycle, if you include that plus the cost of capital, it's going to put this bill somewhere between \$2 and \$3 trillion.

Now, there were other health care provisions that were placed into the bill. There was funding a billion dollars for a center for what's called Comparative Effectiveness. "Comparative Effectiveness" sounds on the surface like, well, why wouldn't you want to compare treatments and only use the treatments that were the best and encourage those treatments that were the best? But the problem is when the Federal Government gets into that type of activity, it's not just that we make recommendations; we tell people what they are going to do because if they don't do what we tell them, we are not

going to pay them. And as a consequence, the role of the Institute for Comparative Effectiveness may loom as a very large player in the delivery of health care in this country.

And it's not just me, a Member from Texas, or even Texas newspapers that are concerned about this. The Boston Globe, the online edition, in an op-ed piece from a few days ago by Phyllis Greenberger talked about why one size doesn't necessarily fit all. And let me just read the last couple of paragraphs from this piece in the Boston Globe:

"In Britain the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence has been issuing appraisals of medical treatments for close to a decade. The institute considers both cost effectiveness, which measures the benefits of a treatment against the expense to provide it, and clinical effectiveness, which measures how much better a new treatment is for patients than an older one. The agency then makes recommendations to Britain's National Health Service about which treatments are worth covering."

That all sounds innocent enough and perhaps a way to get some cost-effective medicine. But remember, Mr. Speaker, Dr. Elias Zerhouni, who recently was head of the National Institutes of Health. When he would come and talk to this body, when he would come and give testimony in front of our congressional committees, he talked about a day when medicine became a great deal more personalized. He talked about the wonder of sequencing the human genome, of knowing so much more about what a person's risks were before those problems ever even had a chance to surface.

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So, personalized medicine was the holy grail of the future.

He talked about medicine that was going to become more personalized and, as a consequence, it would be a great deal more predictive. Because it's more predictive it could be much more preventive and, along those same lines, it would have to be more participatory. But we pretty much throw the concept of personalized medicine to the wayside when we embrace concepts like the Institute for Comparative Effectiveness or Britain's National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence.

Let me read from the second to the last paragraph from a Boston Globe article by Phyllis Greenberger: "Sometimes, though, the agency's findings prevent people from getting the best care possible. Last year, for instance, the institute recommended that the National Health Service not cover the life-extending lung cancer drug Tarceva because of its price tag. Even though the institute's decision was eventually overturned, some British cancer patients were denied their last hope for staying alive."

Now, think about that for a moment. Here is an agency, albeit from a government from another country, that

made a decision that this drug is too expensive. This person has a disease which is not compatible with longevity. Here is a new medicine. It's terribly expensive. We are not going to cover that medicine, and only after they lost the fight did they go back and cover the medicine. But think of the patients during that interval that were denied that newer treatment for a very debilitating disease, their families were denied that treatment and now, of course, the treatment is readily available.

But that is the problem when you have a Federal body that has that order of magnitude of power within their hands. The group that is going to be comprising this, right now nobody really knows who that is or what that will look like. For heaven's sakes, we don't even know who the next Secretary of Health and Human Services is here a month into this new administration.

We need to be more careful about these types of decisions because they may affect each and every one of our constituents at some point in their lives going forward. These are tremendously important decisions and yet, and yet, they are wrapped up into this great big stimulus bill, rushed through, no chance for debate, no chance for thinking about it, simply this is the way it's going to be, take it or leave it, this is what you get.

This is what people find so objectionable about these large bills that come through Congress. And make no mistake about it, they found it objectionable when my party was in power. But it seems like, lately, the bills have gotten bigger, the provisions hidden within them have gotten more varied, more stringent, more widespread, more wide-sweeping provisions, and we are cutting the American people out of the debate when we cut out other Members of Congress, regardless of party.

Remember, each and every one of us was elected to serve roughly 650,000 constituents back home. Some of our congressional districts have grown, some have shrunk since that time, but all of us were sent here with an equal mandate with an equal number of people that we represented. So to cut 40 percent out of the body out of the vote, to cut 40 percent of the body out of the debate, rather, is to cut 40 percent of the American people out of the debate as well.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we heard from the previous speaker from Arizona that we will be considering the omnibus bill, House bill 1105, I think it is, on Wednesday of this week. The good news is the bill is up on the Rules Committee Web site, so, Mr. Speaker, if you or I wanted to look at this bill it, indeed, is available for our viewing here 36 hours before we actually have to vote on the bill. So that's the good news.

The bad news is the bill is up there as a photostatic copy of a previous bill, so it's got some handwritten corrections

on the page. In fact, on a couple of different sections you can see a staple mark up at the top of the page as this bill was photocopied or scanned into some type of scanning reader.

The bad news for that is that when you try to search for a keyword on a page or in the bill, you are not going to be able to do it, because the bill is a replica. It's a scan of a previously printed bill. It's not a committee print of a new bill that is, in fact, searchable on line.

So, we are left with our staffs, over the next 36 hours, to comb through this bill. As the gentleman from Arizona outlined, there are some provisions in that bill that many of us would not be proud of. We will be voting for earmarks for companies that no longer exist because of questions that were raised about some of their practices. Well, none of us, none of us would want to vote in favor of a bill that contained those types of provisions therein.

There may be some provisions, an e-mail I received just taking the floor this evening, a bill that will seriously affect or phase out the District of Columbia school choice program, a program that has been invaluable to many, many families here in the District of Columbia. Why is it necessary to do this on such short notice? Why is it necessary to do this without any debate in Congress, without any public discourse or debate? Why is it necessary to do so so quickly unless you don't want people knowing what you are doing?

I will give credit where credit is due. This time the bill is up on the Rules Committee Web site. Mr. Speaker, if you or I go to the Committee on Rules in the House of Representatives, perhaps if we type that into our search engine on our computer, we could, in fact, see the verbiage for House bill 1105 which will be the omnibus or minibus bill on which we will vote next week.

This is a \$410 billion bill, so it's not insignificant. It may sound significant after TARP 1 and TARP 2 and the stimulus bill, but, nevertheless, it is a significant amount of spending and, in fact, represents one of the largest increases in discretionary spending because this is, after all, spending that we should have passed last summer but decided not to work on before the election because it was politically too dicey. So, again, we simply rolled everything up into one big package, held it until well into the next Congress, and hopefully we are going to pass it very quickly before anyone has a chance to notice what we have done.

This year, regardless of the top number that the President comes down with in his budget, this year I hope we will go through the normal appropriations process. I know it's painful. I know it's painful to have an open rule on these appropriations bills. I know that many Members from my side come down and offer endless amendments. Many Members from the other side

come down and offer endless amendments, and it seems to drag on into the night day after day after day, but this is the work we were sent here to do.

So this year I hope that the House leadership will take it under advisement to do this the correct way, to do this the correct way, to do this the time-honored way, bring these appropriations bills to the floor of the House after they have gone through their markups in subcommittee and full committee, bring them to the floor of the House as an open rule, as an open product, any number of amendments may be made in order, and let's have these bills have a full and fair debate under the intense light of the House of Representatives here. Let's not do it under the cover of darkness, roll them up into a big package and then punt them to sometime in the future when we hope no one's paying attention.

That was a dreadful way to govern last summer. I am, frankly, shocked, Mr. Speaker, that the American people did not take greater umbrage to the way we behaved as we went through our appropriations process last year. Not only did we pass a big bailout bill right before we left to go home and campaign and not bother to explain to anyone why we had done it, but prior to that, prior to that when we were supposed to have done all of our spending bills we quite frankly just didn't do it.

We gave ourselves an incomplete and said we will get back to it 6 months from now when we have got a little more time. Well, now, that bill has come due and this Wednesday we will have that omnibus bill on the floor of the House. We won't have much chance for debate. We likely will not have many amendments that will be made in order, so as a consequence we will have the largest increase in discretionary spending prior to the TARP last year. We will have the largest increase in discretionary spending for a fiscal year ever to come to this country. We will pass it without batting an eyelash.

But the next level of appropriations that start in May, June and July of this year, let's be sure that we do those the correct way. Let's be sure that we have the debates here on the House floor.

If we have to take some difficult votes on amendments, and we always do, there are always some amendments from the other side on which I have difficulty. I am sure there are amendments from my side that give other Members on the other side difficulty, but that's what we are sent here to do, take the tough votes, make the tough decisions, go home and explain ourselves to our constituents.

That's what we were sent here to do. And to abdicate that responsibility, say it's too tough, we are going to roll it up into a big ball, punt it until the next session, that's not what the American people sent us here to do. And I would reference back to the gentleman from Arizona's remarks, it impacts

negatively on the dignity of this House to behave that way.

What are we trying to hide? What are we so afraid of that we can't debate these bills out here on the House floor, let the American people see what is contained within these bills and let us vote with the full knowledge that the country is aware of what we are doing to the extent the country wishes to be aware of what we are doing.

Mr. Speaker, I would point out that you or I could go to the Internet tonight and visit and read House bill 1105 which will be voted on Wednesday. As the speaker from Arizona pointed out, there are some 4, 5 or 6,000 earmarks contained within this bill. It is not a huge amount of the total dollars in the bill, but it is certainly representative of some of the things that people think are important to push into congressional bills at the 11th hour.

So, Mr. Speaker, I hope you and I will spend some time reviewing this bill, House bill 1105, which is now available on the rules Web site. I do apologize, Mr. Speaker, I wish it were searchable by keyword, but unfortunately at the present time we have only got a scan of the bill that was reported back to the Rules Committee from our counterparts in the other body.

As a companion bill that's up there—and I have not had a chance to look at this—but, Mr. Speaker, many of us might be interested in looking at it because I think the bill is likely to come to the floor on Thursday, and this is House bill 1106 which is the bill to adjust mortgages that the President spoke about earlier this week, a \$75 billion bill, and I do hope that many Members, Mr. Speaker, will take the opportunity to become familiar with that bill before we do vote on it later this week.

This is an important concept. I have had many calls from people in my district. I know there is concern because if a bank makes a loan at 4 percent, loans that money out at 5 percent and then is told by the government that it has to reduce that 5 percent expectation of return, how is the bank going to stay solvent if they are borrowing money at 4 percent and they are told they have to accept loans that are going to pay back a lower amount?

It does look like something that may play havoc with the lending industry but certainly, Mr. Speaker, I will be open, I will be open to reading the bill. I am glad to see that that bill was posted up on the rules Web site as well.

Well, a little more than 24 hours from now, the President will stand in the House and deliver his presidential budget to a joint session of the House and Senate. Additionally, I expect him to talk about some other parameters and other prerogatives that are important to the President. I expect to hear a great deal about health care in the President's address to the Nation tomorrow night. In fact, I am looking forward to that.

Certainly some of the comments that came out of the meeting, the bipartisan meeting that the President held with Members of Congress, both the House and the Senate, members of the business community, members of industry, many of those comments were positive comments, particularly as it pertained to health care.

So maybe this is the year where the American people see some significant change in the way health care is administered in this country. I hope that we will have the good sense to do that in a rational way and not in a way that undermines the delivery of health care in this country, but that remains to be seen.

But, nevertheless, the President did speak about that favorably at the conclusion of his remarks today and many of the other Members, both House and Senate, and members of industry that were present in that meeting of responsibility and spending today voiced similar optimism. So being an optimistic person at heart, I hope to hear some significant words about the future direction of health care from the President tomorrow.

It would have been helpful, Mr. Speaker, if Members of the House of Representatives could have received information about the President's budget directly from the White House. My staff has primarily relied upon press reports today in order to get information about the President's budget, that is probably not the ideal way for a budget of this size to come to Members of the Congress.

I would encourage, Mr. Speaker, the House to be assertive in its prerogative to receive this information in a timely fashion from the other, from the other branch of government. After all, we are a coequal branch of government here in the legislative branch.

It was the same phenomenon we encountered during the stimulus bill last week where we were getting reports from people who had acquaintances on K Street, the main lobby groups downtown, where they were getting reports of what was contained within the stimulus bill before we were privy to those same provisions here in the United States Congress.

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This is not a good way to go about disseminating information. Again, I trust that we will see more openness from the administration, because, after all, that is what was promised to us during the runup to the election and certainly what was discussed during the President's inaugural address, and openness in government would require that the legislative branch be treated as that coequal branch of government that we all know it to be, and to receive these reports from the administration in a timely fashion.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to touch on one last point about the stimulus bill. There has been a lot made of the \$19 billion or \$20 billion contained

within the stimulus bill which is to go for advances in health information technology, the computerization of medical records, Mr. Speaker, electronic medical records, certainly a concept that is a valuable one and one that is worth pursuing.

I will just have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, in my 6 years since coming to the House of Representatives since leaving the active practice of medicine for the full time practice of legislation, I have been impressed with the number of medical practices and the number of hospitals and clinics around the country that have voluntarily gone to a system of electronic medical records.

Now, the money put forward in the stimulus bill as I have been able to understand it in the writings that I have been able to find on this money actually put the money forward not until the year 2011. Now, 2011, if you do some quick math, is about 2 years from now, so it doesn't really comport with the concept of getting money out there quickly into the hands of practicing physicians.

You may think, well, a doctor's office is hardly an area for economic development. But, Mr. Speaker, I will tell you, in the State of Texas where we have revamped and reformed our medical liability laws, we have seen a number of physicians move to Texas from other States, a significant number, and it is estimated that each physician coming to a community will in fact generate between \$900,000 to a little over \$1 million in economic activity within that state. So this is not an insignificant concept.

The important thing is if there is advantage to gain from putting this money in the hands of medical practitioners in 2011, the advantage should be there in 2009 as well. I in fact introduced an amendment when we had the markup of this bill in our committee on Energy and Commerce. It was turned back by the majority. I frankly can't quite understand why.

But I think this is something that we might re-look at. There is the ability to make technical corrections, and if indeed it is possible to pay physicians for improving their ability to keep and disseminate medical records and provide them substantial funding for doing so in 2011, it would make good sense to do that in 2009.

After all, Mr. Speaker, we have just 10 months' time before we have to deal with a very substantial and to some degree very disturbing 20 percent cut in reimbursements to physicians, as is mandated under current law under the sustainable growth rate formula. We ought to give them at least a little bit of reassurance that we are serious about our approach to the practicing physician and their ability and willingness to take care of Medicare patients in the future by addressing this shortsightedness in the stimulus bill that we passed last week.

Mr. Speaker, there is no shortage of things we can talk about when it

comes to spending. Certainly the stimulus bill came to us advertised as a jobs bill. It turned out to be a spending bill, and that is a consequence that most of us will have to live with for the rest of our lives. It was an explosive growth in Federal spending.

Unfortunately, we are on a pace to continue to see rapid growth in Federal spending. The President, to his credit, says he is going to cut the deficit in half by the end of his first term. That is a very, very tall order for him to have taken on. I intend to be supportive of that to the extent I can. If it is done in a way without harming the productive sector of our society, if it is done in a way without raising taxes on the productive segment of society, you can expect me to be there with him. If his only approach is to raise taxes during the time of a recession or perhaps even a depression, we have seen in the past that that formula doesn't work, and I don't think there is any way that I could be supportive.

Mr. Speaker, it has been an interesting hour to be down here and talk about the effects of the stimulus bill and spending. It is something where we will have ample opportunity to talk for many, many months ahead. Suffice to it say, it stands to be a very interesting year here in the People's House. I look forward to future full and lively debate on this subject.

CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2009, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. FUDGE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Ms. FUDGE. Mr. Speaker, I stand tonight to represent the Congressional Black Caucus for this hour as we talk about Black History Month. The Congressional Black Caucus is proud to anchor this hour.

Currently, the CBC is chaired by the Honorable BARBARA LEE from the Ninth Congressional District of California. I am Representative MARCIA FUDGE, representing the 11th Congressional District of Ohio, here to anchor the hour for the Congressional Black Caucus.

The CBC Members are advocates for families, nationally and internationally, and have played a significant role as local and regional advocates. We continue to work diligently to be the conscience of the Congress, but because all politics are ultimately local, for that reason we provide dedicated and focused services to the citizens of the congressional districts we represent.

The vision of the founding members of the Congressional Black Caucus, to promote the public welfare through legislation designed to meet the needs of millions of neglected citizens, continues to be the focal point for the legislative work and political activities of the Congressional Black Caucus today.